Laus, Lues, and Louis: Jacobus Plutacrius’ Morbi Gallici...Laus

Around Saturnalia, likely in 1682, one pseudonymous Jacobus Plutacrius published, sine loco et sine nomine and with a coded date, an oration in praise of syphilis, the Morbi Gallici, sive Luis Venereae, aut potius Anonymae laus, “A Praise of the French Disease, or the Venereal Disease, or rather of Anonymous.” In the guise of praising Syphilis, or Lues, however, the author, likely deftly skewers Louis XIV of France. Aside from a brief entry in Astruc’s 1740 annotated bibliography De morbis Venereis libri novem and bibliographies derived of it, the Morbi Gallici...laus has never been studied.

I situate the Morbi Gallici...laus at the intersection of two major strands of Neo-Latin literature. On the one hand, it belongs to the northern European tradition of encomia paradoxa or speeches in praise of unworthy topics, erudite works with heavy allusion to classical literature, much in the vein of Gorgias’ Encomium in Helenam, Erasmus’ Moriae Encomium, Putanius’ Ovi Encomium, and especially the host of praises of gout beginning with Pirckheimer’s Podagrae Laus, itself a confluence of the tradition of the encomium paradoxon and Lucian’s tragedy Podagra. Within this tradition one my also find politically pointed satire like the pseudonymous Corona Regia written against the English King James. The tradition of the encomium paradoxon, studied on its own by Pease (1926) and Miller (1956) and Tomarken (1990), is now included on the broader rubric of Menippean or Saturnalian literature, as by Blanchard (1995) and De Smet (1996), a classification confirmed by the Saturnalian dating of the Laus. On the other hand, the Morbi Gallici...laus makes open allusion to the large body of Neo-Latin writing about syphilis, including not only medical texts but also Fracastoro’s epic Syphilis, sive Morbus Gallicus (1530). I also examine the Morbi Gallici...laus in its historical context, especially the War of the Reunions, to show that the text has heavy political overtones. Further, I demonstrate
how particular readings of classical texts included in the *Laus* and allusions to classical myth create further connections between Louis and *Lues*.

**Bibliography**


